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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001382

SIPDIS

FOR R, P, AND EUR/NCE (FICHTE)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC: COMBATING EXTREMISM

REF: A. STATE 159129

[B](#). IIR 6 824 0127 05

[C](#). IIR 6 824 0112 05

Classified By: Political-Military Officer Brian Greaney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Islamic extremism is rare in the Czech Republic, and Islamic authorities here are keen to ensure outside influences do not become a catalyst for indigenous radicalism. The Czech authorities do monitor for potential Islamic extremist activities. The U.S. Embassy provides training, monitors the media for hate speech, conducts outreach towards members of the Islamic community, and promotes tolerance in all sectors of Czech society. End summary.

OVERVIEW

[1](#)2. (U) Muslims living in the Czech Republic make up a tiny proportion of the population as a whole (less than 0.1 percent). The 2001 national census listed 3699 Czechs Muslims, though the media report a possible ten thousand, and the Islamic Center in Prague claims a total presence at any one time of 20,000, including students and temporary visitors to Czech thermal bath resorts. The largest Muslim communities are in Prague, Brno, and spa towns, such as Teplice. Most resident Muslims maintain a low profile, speak Czech well, and dress as the Czechs do. There are few if any overt manifestations of the Muslim religion anywhere in the republic and Czech Muslim organizations are generally moderate.

[1](#)3. (S) Intolerance in relation to Islam in the Czech Republic generally has more to do with Czech intolerance of immigrant cultures than extremist Islamic preaching. In 2003 a petition of 4,500 signatures from the population of Teplice blocked plans to construct a mosque in the town. Another mosque-building project in Orlova was blocked in 2004, both by the local population and by the security services, when they realized the benefactor had had ties to a suspect Islamic NGO. In this case the local Czech Muslim population cooperated with the security services. There is no evidence of any extremist Islamic NGO activity in the Czech Republic. Islamic authorities in the Czech Republic publicly argue against extremist violence, calling it "contrary to the two main sources of Islam, the Koran and Sunna."

[1](#)4. (U) A notable exception to this general trend is the statement of Samer Shehaden, a Czech-born Palestinian employee of the Islamic Foundation in Prague, who stated in an interview with Czech daily Lidove Noviny that he could not denounce the September 11th attacks on the United States. Karam Al-Badavi, the Imam of the Prague Mosque, distanced the Czech Islamic Foundation from Shehaden, saying Shehaden was only a volunteer translator there and, while he was entitled to his personal views, "Islam denounces all these acts ... it is one of the biggest sins which, according to our faith, condemns the perpetrator to hell."

GOCR ACTION IN RELATION TO EXTREMISM

[1](#)5. (S) The Czech Security Services are continuing to work with both the U.S. Government and their EU partner services to monitor the potential for Islamic extremist activities in the Czech Republic. These services understand that, not only is this country a growing center for western tourists, with many potentially "soft targets," but the overt contribution of Czech troops to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could raise their profile with the extremists. The long-standing and historical relationship between the Czech Republic and Iraq has created an environment in which the security services and police are attuned to the potential for extremists returning to Europe from Iraq, as well as the overall concern in Europe of homegrown Islamic extremist terrorist cells. These security services and police units are aware that illegal activities which are not solely "terrorism" could easily be exploited by extremist groups, such as: counterfeiting or money laundering, procurement

and/or forgery of documents (especially passports/visas), weapons trafficking, etc. The Czech Security Services are aware of the dangers of Islamic extremist groups, and continue to take appropriate steps to monitor individuals and actions, which could lend rise to such groups and coordinate as necessary with their NATO and EU partners.

EMBASSY-PROVIDED TRAINING

16. (S) LEGATT is providing training to Czech security forces on recognizing initial indicators of fundamentalist activity that poses a security threat. The aim is to identify an emerging problem before it becomes a security issue.

MONITORING BY THE EMBASSY

17. (S) Embassy Prague monitors hate speech as part of the normal operations of its Public Affairs, PolEc and DAO sections. The PAS daily Press Review, which is forwarded daily to Washington, would include press reporting of extremist hate speech if it were to emerge. DAO has issued reports in IIR channels relating to public statements or interviews by Islamic figures (Refs B,C). As described below, PolEc and PAS continue to cultivate contacts with Islamic leaders. Discussions of the impact of global extremism on their lives form a major part of these meetings.

EMBASSY OUTREACH TO ISLAMIC LEADERS

18. (C) In October the Ambassador will hold the Embassy,s first Iftar at his residence in Prague. We are currently working with representatives of the Muslim community to identify the appropriate invitees. In August, in an effort at outreach to the Islamic Community Embassy Officers met with Mohammed Ali Silhavy, titular head of all Muslims in the Czech Republic. On Sep 20, Embassy Officers met with Vladimir Sanka of the Islamic Foundation of Prague to build links with the Islamic community and to gain further knowledge of Sanka,s own perceptions of extremism within the Czech Muslim community. Also on Sep 20 Embassy Prague,s PAO met with Muneeb Hasan, head of the Islamic Center in Brno, and members of his management board. The PAO also toured their mosque, and education and cultural facilities. The cumulative message from all of these meetings is that the Islamic leadership in the Czech Republic frowns on extremism, and has avoided external links and speakers from organizations that might promote extremist views. However the leadership does believe that individuals are entitled to their own opinion, and does not limit expression such as personal disapproval of the war in Iraq by members of their community. The rise of global Islamic extremism and in particular the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, Madrid and London, have made life more difficult for Muslims in the Czech Republic. They feel that they are constantly queried by the media and that the Czech Government considers them a group of interest. The leadership also feels that the terrorist attacks negatively affected Czech public attitudes towards the Islamic community and let to a rise in discriminatory behavior. The Embassy is currently considering identifying potential candidates within the Islamic community for IV program visits to the United States.

EMBASSY PUBLIC OUTREACH

19. (C) Embassy Prague,s Public Affairs section has identified important Czech links to the Arab world from its Communist past that may provide useful outreach opportunities. Prague-based universities, think tanks, and training institutions may be an ideal forum for communicating anti-extremist viewpoints. This may have a far greater impact in the wider conflict than an exclusive focus on the tiny Muslim community in the Czech Republic. Additionally the Prague-based headquarters of RFE/RL is a natural platform for projecting the voices of moderate Islam its radio services beaming eastward.

10. (U) In a country that is 70-per cent atheist, where Muslims make up less than 0.1 per cent of the population, and whose tiny Muslim population is not radical, Embassy PublicAffairs has not directly focused on Islamic extremism in its general public outreach programs. Instead public affairs outreach has focused on promoting tolerance within the wider society as a whole. For example, the long running Summer Institute partnership with Palacky University is intended to develop new thinking and methodologies in addressing critical issues for the modernization of Czech education. Embassy Prague,s A/CAO delivered opening remarks this year, focusing on combating intolerance and promoting multi-culturalism in schools. This long-term approach addresses the problem of

intolerance towards several groups in Czech society and, in the context of Islam, we hope that continuing improvement in tolerance in Czech schools will lead to less of the marginalization that has shown to promote extremism in other countries.

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